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Report of the Committee on Information*

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* *The present document is a mimeographed* version of the report of the Committee on Information on the work of its twentieth session. The final report will be issued as *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/53/21/Rev.1).

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I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In paragraph 2 of section I of its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better-balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly;"

and requested the Committee on Information and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, in its resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the report of the Committee and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group,[1] reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in Assembly resolution 34/182, and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67 members. The Committee on Information agreed, at its organizational session in 1980, that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to fifty-first sessions, the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the reports of the Committee[2] and its recommendations, and reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in resolution 34/182 (General Assembly resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162 A and B, 43/60 A and B, 44/50, 45/76 A and B, 46/73 B, 47/73 B, 48/44 B, 49/38 B, 50/31 B, and 51/138 B. At its fifty-second session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[3] and adopted its consensus recommendations (Assembly resolutions 52/70 A and B of 10 December 1997). Furthermore, the Assembly requested the Committee to report to the Assembly at its fifty-third session.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely China and Mexico; at its forty-first session, the Assembly appointed Malta as a new member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, the Assembly appointed Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe members of the Committee; and at its forty-fourth session, the Assembly appointed Nepal a member of the Committee.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee on Information, to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 members, and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay members of the Committee. The Assembly also decided on the appointment of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as a member of the Committee, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, decided to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 78 to 79 members, and appointed Burkina Faso a member of the Committee.

7. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, decided to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 79 to 81 members, and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal as members of the Committee.

8. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 81 to 83 members, and appointed Gabon and Israel members of the Committee.

9. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), decided to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 83 to 88 members, and decided to appoint Belize,

Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan and South Africa members of the Committee.

10. At its fiftieth session the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), decided to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 88 to 89 members, and appointed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea a member of the Committee.

11. At its fifty-second session, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), decided to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 89 to 90 members, and to appoint Georgia a member of the Committee.

12. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Argentina
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Malta
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Romania
Russian Federation
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zimbabwe

II. Organizational questions

A. Opening of the session

13. The organizational meeting of the twentieth session of the Committee on Information was held at United Nations Headquarters on 4 May 1998. The session was opened by the Chairman of the Committee, Mr. José Alberto de Sousa (Portugal).

B. Election of officers

14. Upon the nomination of the representative of Egypt, the Committee elected by acclamation Mr. Abdullahi Abubakar (Nigeria) to serve as a Vice-Chairman and complete an unexpired term of office in the Bureau. The officers of the Committee on Information for the period 1997–1998 are thus as follows:

Chairman:
Mr. José Alberto de Sousa (Portugal)

Vice-Chairmen:
Mr. Holger Martinsen (Argentina)
Mr. Abdullahi Abubakar (Nigeria)
Mr. Salman Abbasy (Pakistan)

Rapporteur:
Mr. Alyaksei Skrypko (Belarus)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

15. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted the agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/1998/1), as amended:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
3. Election of officers.
4. Statement by the Chairman.
5. Statement by the Under-Secretary-General.
6. General debate and consideration of substantive questions:
   (a) Promotion of the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on

the free circulation and wider and better-balanced dissemination of information;

(b) Continuation of the examination of United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations and of the need to establish the new international economic order and the new world information and communication order;

(c) Evaluation and follow-up of the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications.

7. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

16. The Committee held the substantive meetings of its twentieth session at United Nations Headquarters from 4 to 15 May 1998.

17. For consideration of item 6, the Committee had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on:

(a) Implementation of the measures regarding information and communications (A/AC.198/1998/2);

(b) Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (A/AC.198/1998/3 and Corr.1).

D. Observers

18. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Canada, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Luxembourg, Malawi, Namibia, Oman, Panama, Qatar, the Republic of Moldova, Solomon Islands, Suriname, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Holy See.

19. Representatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) also attended.

E. Other matters

20. The Chairman informed the Committee that Angola, the Republic of Moldova and Solomon Islands had requested membership in the Committee.

III. General debate and consideration of substantive questions

21. Statements during the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee: Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Ghana, Guyana, Indonesia (on behalf of the States members of the Group of 77 and China), Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica (on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community), Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Nepal, Netherlands (on behalf of the States members of the Western European and Other States Group), Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (on behalf of the States members of the European Union and associated countries), United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay and Viet Nam.

22. Statements were also made by the observers for Haiti, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Solomon Islands. The Assistant Director-General for Communication, Information and Informatics of UNESCO addressed the Committee, as did the President of the United Nations Correspondents' Association.

23. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, all speakers expressed their sincere dedication to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, which were fundamental freedoms indispensable to democracy and development. They appreciated the important commemoration of World Press Freedom Day on 4 May 1998, which had been organized by the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat, in cooperation with UNESCO, the United Nations Correspondents' Association and the World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC). A number of delegations noted that it was especially meaningful to hold such an event during the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as contained in General Assembly resolution 217 A (III). Many speakers emphasized the importance of article 19 of the Declaration, which embodied the commitment of the international community

to the right to freedom of information and expression. A member of one delegation spoke of a famous journalist killed by extremists in his country, noting, however, that hundreds of other journalists had refused to give up the struggle to pursue their profession. All delegations paid tribute to the dedicated journalists throughout the world who performed their duties in the face of daily threats and harassment. One delegation pointed to its dedication to implementing the Declaration of Alma Ata on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Asian Media, adopted in 1992 at a seminar organized by Kazakhstan in cooperation with the United Nations and UNESCO. The UNESCO representative informed the Committee that the World Press Freedom Prize had been given by UNESCO to a jailed journalist and also referred to the imprisonment of a member of the jury for the Prize.

24. Several speakers recalled the phrase "global village" in describing the world on the threshold of the twenty-first century. Technological achievements in the field of information had obliterated the "constraints of time and space within and between nations", in the words of one speaker. It was of great importance to a number of speakers that the United Nations take action to ensure that developing countries, with the appropriate assistance, could benefit fully from the informatics revolution in meeting the challenges of economic and social development. One speaker, addressing the Committee on behalf of a large group, as well as a number of other speakers, reiterated that they attached the highest priority to the realization of the establishment of new, more just and effective global information and communication practices, based on a free and balanced flow of information, in a world where disparities in technological advances and the gap between the developed and developing countries were widening. It was critical in their view that the gains of the technological revolution in the field of information be made accessible to the developing countries or, in the words of one speaker, the global village would be little more than a "country club". In the words of another delegation speaking on behalf of a large group, there was a need to establish a balance in the dissemination of information, to ensure a diversification of information sources and to attain a mutually beneficial partnership in the information sector. In his view, the principles of the Charter of the United Nations should be upheld and, to this end, public information should be made available to all humankind and not left to the media of a few developed nations. One delegation said that the United Nations must act urgently to end the "colonialism of information" and to establish a more balanced flow of information that neither distorted nor manipulated the realities of developing countries. Concern was expressed by some delegations that news from developing countries did not receive adequate media coverage. One speaker, addressing the Committee on behalf of a large group, acknowledged UNESCO's important work in cooperating with news agencies and broadcasting organizations in developing countries to disseminate information on priority issues.

25. In addressing the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, a number of delegations observed that the role of the Committee on Information in the effort to reform the Organization in the key area of information and communications had diminished. As one speaker put it, the Committee was "off to one side". Members generally agreed that it was now time for the Committee to make a significant contribution in assisting the Secretary-General in reshaping the key area of public information on the eve of a new century. As one delegate put it, it was time "to rethink the past and prepare for the future".

26. A number of speakers addressed the subject of the working methods of the Committee, in the belief that a new mechanism was required to help the Committee negotiate, as well as to impart a new dynamic. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, said that this mechanism should be open-ended, transparent and inclusive, and a number of other speakers supported the creation of an open-ended working group. Many speakers spoke of the need for consensus to prevail in the work of the Committee, although one delegation was of the view that while consensus was important, change might be required to keep up with the winds of reform in the Organization.

27. All speakers welcomed Mr. Kensaku Hogen as head of the Department of Public Information and pointed to the fact that his appointment at the level of Under-Secretary-General signified the importance attached to placing the information and communications function at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization and to developing a culture of communication. Tribute was paid to Mr. Samir Sanbar for his invaluable contributions and untiring efforts in the sphere of public information as former head of the Department.

28. The majority of delegations voiced their support for the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the measures regarding information and communications and agreed that it would serve as a very useful basis for the Committee's deliberations. Several delegations also referred to the earlier report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, the thrust of which the Secretary-General had concurred with. Speakers maintained that the Department of Public

Information, as the focal point of the Organization for information and communications, should be strengthened to fulfil the expectations of its Member States and their peoples around the world. A great many delegations supported the broad objectives of the new orientation for the field of information, as contained in the report of the Secretary-General. Many also believed that, in elaborating and implementing the reform proposals for the reorientation of the Department, the Secretary-General should fully take into account the views of Member States. All agreed that the United Nations should be projected as an open, transparent and public institution and concurred with the view that communications was not a support function, but rather an integral part of the substantive programme of the Organization. Accordingly, one delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, and other speakers encouraged the involvement of the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information in the Secretariat's decision-making processes at the strategic level, in the belief that he had an extremely important role to play as principal strategist for United Nations communications policies. Many speakers expressed support for the plan to institute a strategic planning group within his office to execute an integrated programme for communications and hoped that this group would consider the views of Member States and keep them informed. Another delegation made the point that "strategic guidelines implied choices", and that, in this context, it was essential for the Department of Public Information to follow General Assembly-mandated activities. Several delegations said that they wished to see the Department attach importance to ensuring impartiality and objectivity in United Nations information activities.

29. Many speakers agreed that it was important that the unified message of the United Nations be supportive of the developing countries and of development in general. In the words of one speaker, the United Nations should "convey the voice of the voiceless" to the whole world in an objective manner. One speaker was of the view that the role of information should be strengthened to stimulate development assistance worldwide. It was agreed by a number of delegations that information also had a vital role to play in the promotion of world peace.

30. Many speakers believed that in order to complete the tasks ahead of it, the Department would need to be provided with sufficient resources. They praised the Department of Public Information for having utilized all means of communications to disseminate its materials and pointed to negative consequences for the Department's information activities owing to reduced resources allocated to it in the 1998-1999 budget. One speaker did not favour "an arbitrary percentage reduction of the Department of Public Information's budget" and was of the opinion that each activity should be reviewed regularly on the basis of its relevance, usefulness and effectiveness. Many feared any further reduction could adversely affect the capacity of the Department to fulfil its comprehensive mandates and responsibilities and stressed that mandated information activities must be implemented. They underscored that any change in these mandated activities must be approved by Member States. One speaker was of the view that it would be inadvisable to resort to private contributions to meet financial shortages, as it could affect the priorities established by Member States. Another delegate quoted a statement by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations to the effect that reform was more than mere streamlining of structures, looking at posts or dealing with budgets, rather "it was ensuring that the United Nations was relevant and equipped to deal with present and future challenges in the world".

31. A delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, in agreeing with this viewpoint, said the group fully respected the autonomous responsibility of the Secretary-General for the structure and functioning of the Secretariat and believed that the objective of reform should be to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of information activities, rather than to just cut costs. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said it supported the Secretary-General's goal of ensuring that the United Nations message was delivered with more vigour and purpose and to greater effect and to this end agreed with his reform efforts. It said also that there was a need for a flexible approach from Member States to allow the Department of Public Information to carry out its multiple mandates. A number of delegations said that they looked forward to the detailed blueprint of the new United Nations communications strategy and one expressed disappointment that the Secretary-General's report did not contain more details on the reorientation plan. One delegation said that only by making communications and information a cross-cutting issue in all its programmes and activities could the United Nations effectively realize its long-cherished objective of globally spreading its message of peace, justice and development.

32. As to specific public information activities, many delegations agreed that the Department of Public Information's priorities for 1998 should be to inform the public on: the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court; the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping; and the special

session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, looked forward to an information programme supporting the special session of the Assembly for the review and appraisal of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States[4] scheduled for 1999. A number of speakers expressed support for the Department's programme for Palestine and for its continuance, and several called for more information on decolonization. One delegation welcomed the recent publicity given by the Department of Public Information to the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. Another speaker proposed that the Department of Public Information should consider publicizing the problem of the former Soviet nuclear test site near Semipalatinsk in her country. A number of delegations, stressing the magnitude and increasing negative impact of the Chernobyl disaster, encouraged the Department, in cooperation with other relevant bodies of the United Nations system, to continue to strengthen their efforts to enhance world public awareness of the consequences of that catastrophe. Several delegations said that the Department of Public Information should strengthen its activities to highlight socio-economic problems facing the countries in transition. This, in the view of one speaker, could contribute to generating assistance on the part of the international community in implementing democratic and economic transformations in those countries. A number of speakers pointed to the importance of the information components as an integral part of all peacekeeping and other field operations. In their view, it was of critical importance that the people of the host country be adequately informed of the mandates and goals of these missions.

33. Most speakers were supportive of the views expressed in the report of the Secretary-General on the importance of forming partnerships with information redisseminators, in the belief that such links were absolutely essential in reaching the people of the world. At the same time, several delegations cautioned that, while the cooperation of non-governmental organizations was very much appreciated in carrying out the work of the United Nations, no measures should be taken that would "undermine" the Organization as an intergovernmental body. Several other delegations said that it was useful for the Department of Public Information to have contacts with the media and civil society, but that, at the same time, "the responsibility of the Department of Public Information to serve the Member States" was paramount. On the other hand, many speakers emphasized that the United Nations must continue to build enduring partnerships with non-governmental organizations, the media, educational institutions and other representatives of civil society. In the belief that youth should be the focus of information programmes, one delegation agreed that the Department of Public Information's outreach to educational institutions was important. Another was supportive of the Department's activities for young people with programmes such as the CyberSchoolBus. Some speakers noted with appreciation that the Secretary-General intended to strengthen the working arrangements among the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Department of Public Information.

34. All delegations praised the important work of the United Nations information centres in taking the message of the Organization to the national and regional levels where public opinion was created. Many believed them to be a key component of United Nations outreach, especially for developing countries and countries in transition. One speaker said that the information centres did a good job of maintaining strategic contacts with influential audiences and were thus a very important part of the information strategy of the United Nations. It was noted by several delegations that the role of the centres differed depending upon the specific needs of the country in which they were located. A number of delegations expressed their concern about the cutting back of resources to the centres and were of the view that sufficient funding must be provided to allow them – in particular those located in countries where local media were less developed – to perform their functions. Another delegation said that it was important that national information officers in the field should be trained to use the new technologies.

35. In regard to the process of integrating information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), many speakers agreed this should be done on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the views of the host country, with the understanding that the information functions and the autonomy of the centres would not be adversely affected. One speaker, addressing the Committee on behalf of a large group, was concerned about the problems being encountered with respect to the integration of information centres, and a number of others voiced the same concern. One delegation expressed its support for the Secretary-General's intention to establish a single "United Nations house" in each country, and another, with the same point of view, urged that the Department of Public Information continue, wherever possible, to integrate United Nations information centres under one flag. Several

speakers stated that integration was not effectively serving the greater interest of the United Nations and its public information responsibilities, and one asked for a review of the integration exercise, taking into account experience in the field.

36. Many delegations spoke of the success stories of information centres in their countries. One delegation referred to the vital role that the United Nations Information Centre in Tokyo played in enhancing public understanding of United Nations activities in Japan. Another highlighted the information work of the University for Peace in Costa Rica and expressed appreciation to the Committee for its support of the institution. One delegation said that excellent cooperation existed between the United Nations information centre in Tehran and various governmental and non-governmental bodies in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Another delegation said that its Government valued highly the activities of the information component in the United Nations office in Minsk, and another speaker praised the activities of the United Nations information centre in Accra.

37. One delegation said that there should be a flexible country-level model for information centres and, as for the unified regional centres, it believed there was a need for a careful approach, based on a range of factors. Another said that the proposal for establishing regional hubs should not be implemented through elimination of or reduction in resources of effectively functioning centres and information components in the field. One delegation urged the Secretary-General to accord high priority to requests by Member States to open centres in their capitals. Another reiterated its call for an information centre in Port-au-Prince and one delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, reiterated the request for an information officer for the multi-island office of UNDP in Kingston.

38. All speakers agreed with the Secretary-General's strong emphasis in his report on the potential of new technologies to expand the dissemination capabilities of the United Nations. All were unanimous in the belief that the Internet had opened important new avenues of communications for the Organization and praised the bold steps being taken by the Department of Public Information in effectively entering cyberspace, especially through the Internet, the so-called fourth medium. Many delegations praised the Department's work in providing excellent electronic services, which were widely used every day, and pointed to its efforts in maintaining and enriching the United Nations home page on the World Wide Web. In order to bring electronic information to developed and developing countries alike, several delegations urged the Department of Public Information to work to expand the electronic availability of United Nations information in all six languages. One delegation referred to the need to clear cyberspace and satellite broadcasting of violent and "immoral" materials.

39. Two delegations noted that all 185 permanent missions were now connected to the United Nations Web site and other United Nations databases. A number of speakers commended the use of information technology by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. One said the work of the Library merited attention and needed to be developed and supported in every way. Another speaker thanked the staff of the Library for their "innovative role" in disseminating very helpful information via electronic mail and welcomed as a "positive development" the fact that, as a result of the Department's initiative, permanent missions now had the opportunity to enjoy equal access to electronic data. Several speakers were of the view that the work of the Committee on Information and that of the Economic and Social Council's Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics should be complementary in promoting the use of modern information technology for the benefit of the United Nations and its Member States. It was observed by one delegation that the United Nations did not have an Organization-wide mechanism for technology planning and budgeting and, in this regard, expressed appreciation for what he considered to be the Department's "voluntary efforts" on the United Nations home page. He called for "greater focus and attention and reallocated resources" to be devoted to this area.

40. While clearly appreciating the reach and scope of electronic communications, a majority of speakers stated that it was of particular importance to the people of the developing countries that the Department of Public Information should maintain its outreach through the traditional media. In this connection, they appreciated the Department's continuing efforts to strengthen United Nations Radio. Another suggested that Member States should be informed of "who exactly were the recipients" of United Nations radio programmes and on what frequency they received them. Several delegations pointed to the good work of the Caribbean Radio Unit and supported the long-standing mandate of full programming in French and in Creole for Haiti, calling for a report on that matter. One delegation referred to the Department's "New Contacts" radio programme and said that it was becoming more useful to his country's media. Another speaker said that Spanish-language stations should receive radio programmes through the Internet. Several delegations drew attention to the need for increased United Nations Radio broadcasting in Russian, as well as for publications in that language. One speaker

pointed to the agreements that his country and other Portuguese-speaking countries had made with United Nations Radio to distribute information in the Portuguese language.

41. A number of speakers supported the feasibility study on a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity currently being conducted and looked forward to receiving its results. One delegation regretted, however, that the Committee had not played a part in the preparation of the study. Many were of the view that the Department of Public Information should make strong efforts to develop such a capacity as a priority, although one delegation said that it must be compatible with the interests of developing countries. On the other hand, several delegations were not certain that direct radio broadcasting by the United Nations on a global level was warranted. One delegation urged that the Department of Public Information consider the possibility of further exploiting existing international media networks in order to avoid competing with them. Another was very supportive of United Nations international radio capacity, in the belief that it would greatly benefit the peoples of the small island developing countries, and further justified such an initiative as a means of telling the United Nations story daily to worldwide audiences, as well as of helping to narrow the information gap. One speaker said that the medium of television needed more attention from the Department.

42. One delegation protested the "violation of its national sovereignty by radio and television transmissions from another country", which were directed specifically against it for "subversive goals".

43. One speaker called for general strengthening of United Nations publications, while another called for further streamlining of the Department's active publications programme since a "cost-based, consumer-driven process" was vital at this time. On the subject of linguistic diversity, one delegation said that information in English was of "extremely limited usefulness" for its people, and therefore called for the issuance of publications and radio programmes in all official languages, particularly Russian. Several delegations agreed with this point of view and stressed the importance of the Russian language to the citizens of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. One speaker said that print and audio-visual materials, as well as electronic products, in Chinese were "still far from enough". On this same subject, one delegation asked that the Department of Public Information "diversify its linguistic programmes" to include Farsi. Several delegations called for more products in Arabic.

44. As to the Department's relations with the press, one speaker said that the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General expertly provided complete and timely information to the media and another expressed its appreciation for the Department's services to correspondents. One speaker said that the Department should give priority to providing delegations with press releases. The representative of the accredited press corps at Headquarters said that the current Secretary-General had been very accessible in his dealings with the media. He appealed for even-handedness in dealing with the press. A number of speakers expressed their support for training programmes for information professionals from the developing countries and appreciated the progress made by the Department of Public Information in training broadcasters and journalists from these countries.

45. One delegation praised the important work of the Department of Public Information's Visitors' Service and expressed special appreciation to the tour guides. He hoped that the limits on tour group size could be relaxed in the interest of added productivity.

46. At the end of the general debate, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information made a statement responding to some of the questions raised by delegations.

IV. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session

47. The Committee then took up item 7 of its agenda, and a debate on procedures for negotiations ensued. One group maintained that negotiations should take place in the Bureau of the Committee, together with the representatives of the regional groups and the Group of 77 and China. A large group maintained that the Committee needed more transparent procedures and that negotiations should take place in an open-ended working group. At the end of the discussion, the Chairman said that he would initiate consultations on an informal basis to consider the draft resolutions and invited all interested delegations to attend these consultations, to begin the next morning. The Committee proceeded to adopt this latter course of action.

48. At its 7th meeting, on 15 May 1998, the Committee decided, by consensus, to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolutions and draft decision:

Draft resolution A

Information in the service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information,[5]

Taking note also of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information,[6]

Urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, and recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process":

(a) To cooperate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) To ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and to condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) To provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) To enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) To aim at, in addition to bilateral cooperation, providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public, private or other, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(iv) The facilitation, as appropriate, of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market;

(f) To provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication[7] of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

Draft resolution B

United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Reiterating its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee on Information as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations to the General Assembly relating to the work of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat,

Welcoming the fact that the Secretary-General has established a post of Under-Secretary-General for

Communications and Public Information, with the appointee to that post to head the Department of Public Information, and noting that the Secretary-General concurs with the view expressed in the report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities entitled "Global vision, local voice: a strategic communications programme for the United Nations"[8] that the information and communications function should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization,

1. *Reaffirms* its resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946 in which it established the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat;

2. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General, in respect of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 2 of its resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993;

3. *Expresses its concern* about the trend to reduce the resources allocated to the Department of Public Information, and reiterates that all changes or reductions must be in accordance with the existing budgetary rules as consistent with Article 17 of the Charter of the United Nations;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to implement fully the mandates as established by the General Assembly;

5. *Takes note* of the conceptual framework outlined by the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations public information activities as contained in his report on implementation of the measures regarding information and communications,[9] encourages him to further develop his proposals for the reorientation of United Nations activities in the area of public information and communications, taking into account the views of Member States in this regard, and requests him to submit his detailed plan thereon to the Committee on Information for consideration at its twenty-first session in 1999;

6. *Emphasizes* that through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to the developing countries and others with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation should contribute to bridging the existing gap between the developing and the developed countries in the crucial field of information and communications;

7. *Takes note with appreciation* of the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information for the formation and day-to-day functioning of the information components of peacekeeping and other field operations of the United Nations, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department of Public Information at the planning stage of such future operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with other substantive departments of the Secretariat;

8. *Encourages* the Secretary-General to further strengthen consultative arrangements, as appropriate, between the Department of Public Information and other substantive departments of the Secretariat, in particular those dealing with development issues;

9. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General regarding the review of major publications by the Department of Public Information submitted to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session,[10] and urges the Secretary-General to exert all efforts to ensure timely production and dissemination in all official languages of the United Nations of all its major publications;

10. *Emphasizes* that the publications should fulfil an identifiable need, should not duplicate other publications inside the United Nations system and should be produced in a cost-effective manner;

11. *Urges* the Secretary-General to exert all efforts to ensure that publications, as well as other public information products of the Department of Public Information, contain comprehensive, objective and equitable information about the issues before the Organization and maintain editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full consistency with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly;

12. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General to ensure full and direct access of the representatives of the Member States to the briefings organized at Headquarters by the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General and to ensure wider dissemination of the outcome of such briefings;

13. *Also calls upon* the Secretary-General to exert all efforts to ensure that information to be presented to the media is made available to delegations fully and in a timely fashion;

14. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the evaluation of publications produced by the Department of Public Information in the sphere of development, submitted to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session,[11] and requests him to renew his efforts to better meet the needs for wider dissemination of development-related information;

15. *Welcomes* the report of the Secretary-General on the evaluation of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library submitted to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session,[12] and encourages him to continue his efforts to introduce the latest technological developments into the work of the Library with a view to ensuring that it continues and strengthens its role as a broadly accessible resource for information on the United Nations for Member States and others;

16. *Reaffirms* the importance attached by Member States to the role of United Nations information centres in effectively and comprehensively disseminating information in all parts of the world, in particular in developing countries and countries in transition, and especially in those countries where there is need for greater understanding about United Nations activities;

17. *Also reaffirms* that the United Nations information centres meet the primary objectives outlined by the Committee in its report on its ninth session;[13]

18. *Takes note* of the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities[8] concerning United Nations information centres, including the proposal for the organizing of a United Nations information centres network and the establishment of regional hubs, and notes that these proposals are being considered by the Department of Public Information;

19. *Also takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the results of the trial integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme, submitted to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session;[14]

20. *Further takes note* of the observation by the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities regarding the substantial problems that some integrated information centres have encountered in performing their information and communications functions, and accordingly requests him to take this experience into account;

21. *Stresses* that the future integration exercise should be carried out in a cost-effective manner and on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country and ensuring that the information functions and the autonomy of the United Nations information centres are not adversely affected, and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session;

22. *Emphasizes* the need to review earlier cases of integration of United Nations information centres, in accordance with paragraph 87 of General Assembly resolution 52/220 (III) of 22 December 1997, with a view to rectifying the situation if the need arises;

23. *Requests* that, in respect of developing proposals for the establishment of regional hubs, the views of the Member States concerned be taken fully into account;

24. *Reaffirms* the role of the General Assembly in relation to the opening of new United Nations information centres, and invites the Secretary-General to make such recommendations as he may judge necessary regarding the establishment and location of these centres;

25. *Takes note* of the information provided by the Secretary-General on the allocation of resources to United Nations information centres in 1996,[15] and calls upon him to continue to study ways and means of rationalizing and effecting equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session;

26. *Welcomes* the action by some Member States with regard to providing financial and material support to United Nations information centres in their respective capitals, and invites the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to consult Member States, where appropriate, on the possibility of providing the centres with additional voluntary support on a national basis, bearing in mind that such support should not be a substitute for the full allocation of financial requirements for the United Nations information centres in the context of the programme budget of the United Nations;

27. *Takes note* of the requests by Gabon, Guinea, Haiti and Kyrgyzstan for information centres or information components;

28. *Recognizes* the continued enhanced cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the University of Peace in Costa Rica as a focal point for promoting United Nations activities and disseminating United Nations information materials;

29. *Expresses its full support* for the wide, accurate, equal and prompt coverage of United Nations activities through the continuation of United Nations press releases both in working languages of the Secretariat, namely English and French, and, where circumstances require, in other languages, and stresses the importance of the continued speedy issue and high quality of those press releases in both working languages;

30. *Encourages* the Secretary-General to continue exploring ways and means of improving the global access to airwaves of United Nations Radio and, where possible, through partnership with other media services, bearing in mind that radio is one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching media available to the Department of Public Information and an important instrument in United Nations activities, such as development and peacekeeping, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/44 B, and, in that regard, requests the Secretary-General to prepare a report on his efforts to develop an international radio broadcasting capacity for the Organization, taking into account the linguistic diversity of Member States, and to submit it to the Committee on Information as soon as possible and no later than at its twenty-first session;

31. *Also encourages* the inclusion of programmes of United Nations Radio, in all available languages, on the United Nations home page on the Internet;

32. *Underlines* the continued importance for the Department of Public Information of using traditional and mass media channels to disseminate information on the United Nations, and encourages the Department of Public Information to take full advantage of recent developments in information technologies, such as the Internet, to improve, in a cost-effective manner, the dissemination of information on the United Nations, taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization;

33. *Welcomes* the steps being undertaken by the Department of Public Information to strengthen its capacity to carry out its responsibility for both maintaining and coordinating the United Nations home page and for providing its public information content;

34. *Expresses its appreciation* for the ongoing programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries conducted by the Department of Public Information, and calls for its further expansion so as to include a larger number of trainees from developing countries, as well as trainees from countries in transition;

35. *Acknowledges* the important work carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and its collaboration with news agencies and broadcasting organizations in developing nations in disseminating information on priority issues;

36. *Requests* the Department of Public Information to continue to ensure the greatest possible access for United Nations guided tours, as well as to ensure that displays in public areas are kept as informative, up-to-date, relevant and technologically innovative as possible;

37. *Urges* the Department of Public Information to take the necessary measures, through the provision of relevant and objective information, with a view to achieving the major objectives set forth in the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa;[16]

38. *Recalls* its resolutions concerning the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, in particular resolutions 51/138 B of 13 December 1996 and 52/177 of 16 December 1997, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the countries concerned and with the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to continue to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the consequences of this disaster;

39. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session, in 1999, and to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, in 1999, on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

40. *Decides* that, starting from the twenty-first session of the Committee on Information, preparation of the report of the Committee shall be carried out by an open-ended working group;

41. *Requests* the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session;

42. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-fourth session an item entitled "Questions relating to information".

Draft decision

Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information

The General Assembly decides to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 90 to 93 members and to appoint Angola, the Republic of Moldova and Solomon Islands as members of the Committee on Information.

49. Following the adoption of the draft resolutions and the draft decision, statements were made by the Netherlands (on behalf of the States members of the Western European and Other States Group and Japan), Japan, Indonesia (on behalf of the States members of the Group of 77 and China), Jamaica, Brazil, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (on behalf

of the States members of the European Union), Italy and Côte d'Ivoire.

50. The representative of the Netherlands said that his group was generally satisfied with the results achieved during the current session of the Committee and with the constructive atmosphere in which discussions had taken place. However, he regretted that "the consensus reached at the level of the General Assembly, whereby the consultative mechanism commonly referred to as the 'Extended Bureau' had been agreed upon, was ignored". He emphasized that his group continued to be of the opinion that the Extended Bureau had served the Committee and its members well and that the results achieved at the current session did not differ significantly from those reached when the Extended Bureau had been used. He said that his Group regretted that a full discussion of the paragraph in draft resolution A containing a reference to the "so-called new world information and communication order" had not been possible. His group did not support the concept of a new world information and communication order which, in its view, belonged to a time long past and could be used to stifle the freedom of the media and the free flow of information. He added that the acceptance by his Group of the text of the resolutions ought not to be taken as agreement with that concept, which should be reviewed at the next session of the Committee. He said that, beginning with the next session of the Committee, preparation of the report would be held within an open-ended working group and hoped that the "formality and physical distance" that had characterized the informal meetings of interested delegations at the current session would "not be repeated".

51. The representative of Indonesia stressed that the open-ended informal consultations had proved to be extremely meaningful and had contributed to the principle of transparency and participation which should be maintained. His group was of the view that draft resolution A, particularly the part on the new world information and communication order, was of particular importance. It also believed in the "centrality" of the Department of Public Information and affirmed that the Department must fulfil its tasks of making the world aware of priority issues in an "equitable manner". The representative of Jamaica agreed with the views of the Group of 77, as did the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, who added that the idea of a new world information and communication order had never been intended to entail a curbing of the free flow of information. The representative of Côte d'Ivoire appreciated, on the part of the African States Group, that the aspirations of his group had been taken into consideration.

52. The representative of Brazil appreciated the establishment of an open-ended working group and the fact that the Committee "had the courage" to move in a direction of change and hope for the future. The representatives of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Italy said that they found the session to have been a productive one and appreciated the spirit of compromise.

53. The representative of Japan reiterated that the Department's activities should not be considered non-programme ones, and said his delegation strongly opposed any reduction in the Department's budgetary resources from the level approved by the General Assembly. He said also that, while his delegation accepted draft resolution A, he urged the developing countries to embark on a new path and "consider new ideas at the next session of the Committee".

54. The Chairman announced that the Committee on Information would hold a one-day resumed session prior to the consideration by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of item 87, entitled "Questions relating to information" (resolutions 51/137 of 13 Decen. er 1996 and 52/70 B of 10 December 1997), of the provisic al agenda of the fifty-third regular session of the General Assembly. The proposed report of the Secretary-General on an international radio broadcasting capacity would be discussed at that time.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/36/21); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/39/21); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/40/21); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/41/21); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/43/21); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/44/21); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/45/21); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/46/21); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/47/21); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/48/21); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/49/21); ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/50/21), and ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/51/21).

[3] Ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/52/21).

[4] *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April-6 May 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[5] Ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/53/21).

[6] A/53/__.

[7] See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, Belgrade, 23 September to 28 October 1980*, vol. 1, *Resolutions*, sect. III.4, resolution 4/21.

[8] A/AC.198/1997/CRP.1.

[9] A/AC.198/1998/2.

[10] A/AC.198/1997/3.

[11] A/AC.198/1997/4.

[12] A/AC.198/1997/2 and Add.1.

[13] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21), chap. III.D, recommendation 36.

[14] A/AC.198/1997/5.

[15] A/AC.198/1997/6.

[16] A/52/871-S/1998/318.

Annex I

Statement by the Chairman of the Committee on Information at the opening of the twentieth session

1. As we start the twentieth session of the Committee on Information, allow me first to welcome Mr. Kensaku Hogen, the newly appointed Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.

2. I have had the opportunity to meet with him on several occasions, and I am pleased to note the provision of availability, dialogue and cooperation on his part. I look forward to continuing such an open relationship in the future.

3. I would also like to extend my greetings to his predecessor, Mr. Samir Sanbar, whose dynamic in dealing with information issues was always an encouragement to me, and I wish to thank him for the support that I received throughout the years.

4. The opening meeting of the twentieth session of the Committee is being held on the same day that the United Nations has celebrated, here in the same room, World Press Freedom Day, to honour and remember those reporters, journalists and editors who were victims of censorship and repression and who, in many cases, died while serving in the line of duty and promoting a free press.

5. The year 1997 saw no progress regarding freedom of the press, and it must be underlined that an independent media, acting without interference, is of crucial importance to the fostering of democracy and development.

6. The right to freedom of opinion and expression has a further meaning this year, when we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

7. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the measures regarding information and communications focuses on a new orientation towards spreading the message of the United Nations, and the appointment of an Under-Secretary-General to head the Department is a clear signal of the intention to develop a culture of communications throughout the Organization.

8. The Committee on Information, with its specific mandate, has an important role to perform in making sure that the United Nations continues to draw public support, enhances its efficiency and strengthens its capacity to communicate at country and regional levels.

9. The report of the Secretary-General contains several points on the new orientation of the Department of Public Information that deserve reflection. In this regard, it is my conviction that members of the Committee share identical views on the important role of information technology, with its rapid advances, in sending forth the message of the United Nations – and quickly. In this particular field, it is rewarding to observe the growing number of people who use the Internet to obtain information about the United Nations and its agencies.

10. This does not diminish the continuing important role in promoting the United Nations of traditional technology, such as print, television and, naturally, radio, which is a cost-effective and far-reaching tool for keeping all the regions of the world informed about what the United Nations is doing. Also, in disseminating public information, United Nations Radio is of key importance in peacekeeping operations and humanitarian activities.

11. I have just made reference to the elements that today contribute to the fastest dissemination of the image of the United Nations but will refrain from going into detail regarding all the subjects for reflection contained in the report of the Secretary-General, namely the partnership with information disseminators, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, publications and United Nations information centres, which also play an important role in the Organization's ability to communicate at country and regional levels.

12. I have been in contact with representatives of the different groups and with individual members and intend to continue to remain so. Today, at the opening meeting, I wish to thank these individuals for their cooperation, understanding and suggestions, which have been of great importance to me in preparing for this twentieth session.

13. I am encouraged by the indications that I have been receiving to the effect that members of the Committee wish, as in the past, to have consensus guide our work, and I am looking forward to a constructive session, informed by a spirit of cooperation.

Annex II

Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information at the opening of the twentieth session of the Committee on Information

1. I consider it a distinct pleasure and honour to have my first opportunity to address the Committee on Information. I have sought, in the few weeks that I have been at the helm of the Department of Public Information, to meet personally as many of the representatives of the members of the Committee as possible. I have also had the pleasure of exchanging views with the major groups of States represented in the Committee, and I have been greatly encouraged by the cordial welcome and advice that I received from all of you.

2. May I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to my distinguished predecessor, Mr. Samir Sanbar. He has left for me a department of hard-working staff members dedicated to the service of the United Nations and, in his very cordial conversations with me, has given me invaluable advice about the Department, as well as about the Committee on Information.

3. In my discussions with representatives of Member States at various levels, it has become clear to me that the issues related to the reform process are uppermost in the minds of the members of the Committee. Indeed, the Secretary-General's call for a reorientation of the communications and public information activities of the United Nations has also been my first concern since the day I joined the Organization. The task and challenge before us are to elaborate a comprehensive plan and strategy that will make the process of reorientation a reality. The report of the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities has provided us with a clear analysis and recommendations that will assist us greatly in this endeavour.

4. As he has stated in his report entitled "Implementation of the measures regarding information and communications" (A/AC.198/1998/2), the Secretary-General concurs with "the conceptual approach and the thrust of the recommendations" of the Task Force. In addition to the recommendations of the Task Force, I have also studied carefully the information that emerged from comprehensive staff-management consultations within the Department of Public Information.

5. The Secretary-General has underscored the fundamentals of the reorientation process by emphasizing, first, the essential role of communications "as an integral part of the substantive programme of the United Nations", and, second, the need to "develop a culture of communications throughout the Organization".

6. I believe that the Secretary-General, in establishing these priorities, has laid the foundations of the new orientation of our public information and communications activities. It follows that under these guidelines the next steps, that is to say, the development and implementation of specific measures, should become a relatively easier task. In respect of giving meaning to these priorities, I would look to the advice we receive at the current session of the Committee, and also to the broad objectives defined by the Secretary-General in his report. These include:

- The need to project an image of the Organization as an open and transparent public institution;
- The need to strengthen the Organization's ability to communicate at the country and the regional level around the globe, and to strengthen its capacity to use the latest information technologies to that end;
- The need to develop the capacity to deploy given resources flexibly to meet exigencies;
- The need to strengthen further the Department's capacity to work closely with other parts of the Organization to design and implement communications and information strategies for substantive and thematic objectives;
- The need to follow closely the strategic guidance and direction of the General Assembly on the implementation of mandates.

7. The role and influence of information media worldwide have undergone dramatic changes in the decades since the creation of this Organization. Media organizations are now in many instances in a position to take on the roles of opinion makers. In today's democratic milieu, once public opinion is formed on particular issues highlighted by the media, political leaders respond quickly. The basic mandate of the Department of Public Information calls for "an informed understanding" of the work of the Organization. Today, however, the effort required to have the media disseminate a sufficient quantum of accurate information about the work of the United Nations is greater than ever before. Sensational stories are inevitably given first priority in the highly competitive culture of today's media. In this

environment, issues concerning conflicts and natural disasters leading to heavy loss of life invariably gain prominence. On the other hand, stories concerning, for instance, the alleviation of poverty, social development, the rights of the ageing and the disabled, and so forth rarely appear in the newspapers or on broadcasts. The existence of this reality does not mean, however, that we in the Department of Public Information must give up in despair.

8. It is essential that we come to understand the requirements of today's media culture and respond appropriately so as to disseminate the United Nations message to all parts of the world. In this effort, we all have to work together – by "we" I mean the staff of the Department, the staff of the whole Organization and, not least, representatives and ambassadors of Member States. Here lies, I believe, the true meaning of "communications culture". This means that in planning and implementing all mandated programmes care should be taken to give the need for communications a high priority. This also means that the Department of Public Information must strive to keep in step with the latest trends in the field of communications and, more importantly, acquire the latest technologies that play such a crucial role in producing the dramatic changes in the world of information.

9. When the Department of Public Information was established, the print medium and radio were dominant. Soon thereafter, television came forth to compete for public attention on an equal footing. With the advent of satellite broadcasting, however, the current decade has seen such an explosive growth in the reach of the visual media that Marshall McLuhan's "global village" may be said to be already upon us. The phenomenon of a new fourth medium, the Internet, has only added to the rapid "annihilation of distance", to use Arnold Toynbee's phrase. This new medium, though still in the early stages of its development, has compelled communications and information specialists everywhere to recognize its far-reaching potential, and they have been responding immediately. We in the Department of Public Information can do no less.

10. I am glad to report that we already have an effective and efficient operation in the Department which enables us to play a central role in managing, coordinating and providing public information content for the United Nations home page on the Internet. It is my intention to make every effort within the limited resources at our disposal to continue to enhance the Department's capacity to use the new medium to its full extent. Print, radio and video production will be geared towards taking optimum advantage of the multimedia capacity of the Internet. Furthermore, in order to underscore the importance of the Internet and utilize its potential in interfacing with the other three media, I am keeping the Information Technology Section directly in my office, and I intend to strengthen its leadership by raising it to the Chief-of-Service level, through redeployment of existing resources. Steps will also be taken to further enhance training in the use of the Internet to cover all staff in the Department, so as to enable all divisions to make their contribution and thus complement the work of the Information Technology Section.

11. One of the important recommendations that emanated from the report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities was the need to strengthen the capacity of the Department for strategic planning. In order to meet this need, I am establishing within the Department a Strategic Communications Planning Group which will assist and advise me on critical issues that have a direct bearing on the image of the Organization. The Group will be composed of the Directors and Chiefs of Service of the Department and will be supported by a small unit in my office. The functions of the Group have been spelled out in the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/AC.198/1998/2. What I wish to stress in addition is that the Group will also enable me to have a direct link to all the staff in the Department and keep them informed of all the relevant and significant discussions and decisions, taken at higher levels, that affect them.

12. In keeping with the Department's role in developing and implementing the information and communications programmes of the Organization, I should like to stress the need to continue the close working relations that exist between the Department of Public Information and other substantive departments of the Secretariat. Indeed, this is another key aspect of the "communications culture" that the Secretary-General has called for. It is only through an Organization-wide recognition of this need that we can ensure that public information and communications components are integrated into all programmes. The Department of Public Information has a wealth of experience in working closely with other departments and programmes to develop and effectively implement publicity programmes for major world conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly. It has also succeeded in developing close and effective relationships with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs in ensuring that public information and communications are given their due priority in field operations.

13. One significant aspect of the Department's work in support of world conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly involves the availability of sufficient

resources for such activities. While the General Assembly established special additional allocations in the budget for the Department's promotional activities in support of the recent cycle of world conferences on economic and social issues, no such allocations are being made for the special sessions of the Assembly. The result is that the Department of Public Information has very limited resources in its regular budget to allocate for activities in support of the special sessions. I have in mind the very important upcoming special session on the world drug problem as well as the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court. I believe that the special allocation by the Assembly of very modest amounts for such publicity programmes, for use by the Department of Public Information, would greatly enhance our capacity to assist in ensuring the success and popular impact of the deliberations and results of the special sessions. I should add that the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping are also major priorities as regards the Department's information and communications activities this year. I am glad to report that we are working closely with the substantive departments concerned to ensure that these landmark events are recognized around the world.

14. Given the importance attached to the situation in Africa by the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Secretary-General and the Department itself, we undertook at very short notice a major media outreach effort to publicize the recent report of the Secretary-General on Africa. Both to maximize impact and in the interest of speed, United Nations information centres and services, as well as selected journalists, were provided via electronic mail, facsimile or the Internet with the embargoed press materials we had prepared, and with the report itself. This was the first time that the Organization had used the Internet and electronic mail to provide significant press materials. As a result, the report received outstanding worldwide media coverage.

15. The image of the United Nations in the media worldwide varies from country to country. Moreover, it may sometimes pass through a cycle of favourable and unfavourable media comment in the same countries. To a considerable extent, these situations also reflect how effectively we have been able to package and present our activities to the mass media in a timely and news-oriented manner. To respond to such challenges quickly and effectively requires both an effective news-gathering capacity and, at the same time, a media response capacity. Both functions, though interlinked, are also distinct in terms of the type of activities they entail. To develop the former, an approach built around the concept of a central news desk tied to the global news cycle will be developed in the Department. The elements are present in the existing News Distribution Section. What is needed is to further strengthen its news-gathering and timely distribution capacity. To strengthen the media response capacity of the Department, in order to respond adequately to media comment on the work of the Organization, I intend to establish an interdivisional task force that will be responsible for analysing media reports and for providing advice on appropriate responses. In cases of misinformation, it would ensure that necessary steps are taken to provide the media with an accurate picture. Elements of this capacity also exist in the Department, and a good example of a very useful product of such activity is the small publication entitled *Setting the Record Straight*. I believe copies of the latest edition are available on the table at the back of this room.

16. The simplest description of the work of the Department could perhaps be provided in two words: "building partnerships". If I may extend this description further, I would call it "building partnerships with redisseminators". First and foremost among these partners are the media. The Secretary-General himself has opened his doors to the media. With the help of the Office of the Spokesman, media representatives have accompanied the Secretary-General on many of his important missions, and the results are there to see in the news headlines. Indeed, the Secretary-General has established a model for us in building our partnerships with the media.

17. For those of us in New York and Geneva, our immediate partner is of course the United Nations Correspondents' Association (UNCA). I am very glad to report that this morning's special commemoration of World Press Freedom Day was co-sponsored by UNCA, among others. This, I understand, is a first occasion for such cooperation, and I can justly express my pleasure and pride in being part of this new partnership. In keeping with the Secretary-General's desire, I intend to establish a dialogue with the representatives of UNCA so that we can work together to ensure the best possible working conditions for UNCA's membership.

18. Another very important partner in the redissemination of information about the United Nations is of course the non-governmental organization community. I am greatly encouraged by the mounting interest on the part of non-governmental organizations in becoming associated with the Department of Public Information. The role of civil society, especially non-governmental organizations and the business community, is increasingly recognized around the world.

Our objective, as part of the new orientation, will be to improve the facilities for their activities at the United Nations on a continuous basis. This applies equally in the field, where our information centres perform functions similar to those of the Department's Non-Governmental Organization Section at Headquarters. It shall be my endeavour to encourage non-governmental organizations from all parts of the world to develop links with the Department and thus become partners in reaching out to the grass roots, so as to mobilize support for the United Nations.

19. In addition to communicating with information redisseminators, the Department also has a very significant programme of direct dissemination of information to the public. These members of the public are the over 600,000 people who visit the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna every year to take guided tours and participate in briefing programmes. Together with the Public Inquiries Unit and the Group Programmes Unit, the United Nations guided tour programme constitutes a unique and effective information dissemination activity. It shall be my endeavour to ensure that the current restrictions on the number of visitors per tour group and the resulting financial situation are addressed, and that workable solutions are found so that they may continue as valuable communications and income-generating activities.

20. The advent of new technologies in the information age is often confined to mean the advent of the Internet. In many ways this may be true, but the new technologies have also had a very significant effect on the growth of the traditional media, including radio and television, which have gone from strength to strength. This is especially important for countries where the Internet is still in its initial stages and is too expensive for widespread use. The Department has therefore continued to attach priority to these two traditional media, especially for broadcasts to developing countries. Recently, a study on the feasibility of the development of a United Nations international radio capacity was completed with the cooperation of a major national broadcasting organization. We are examining various aspects of the study, especially the technical, financial, programming and managerial implications. I will be reporting to Member States on possible further steps in this regard as soon as possible. In the meantime, the Department is preparing to launch a pilot project for a direct broadcasting schedule for selected regions in Africa and Europe. Furthermore, the posting of audio files of daily United Nations news bulletins on the Internet illustrates a new avenue of growth for the two media together on the United Nations Web site.

21. In the field of video services, I should like to point with great satisfaction to our ongoing partnership with the Cable News Network in producing and broadcasting the "UN in Action" series to a worldwide audience. The new orientation of the Department will strengthen and encourage such partnerships with media organizations around the world.

22. The role of the print medium continues to be a central focus of our communications policies. This is so despite the growth of the other three media. The Department's publications programme remains at the centre of our outreach efforts. Last year, a major readership survey confirmed the importance of United Nations print materials to redisseminators around the world. The Department will focus on a more demand-driven publication programme to ensure production of high-quality, attractive material that demonstrates the relevance and centrality of the work of the United Nations system to the everyday lives and concerns of people everywhere.

23. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library of the future will be a library without walls whose foundation will be technical innovation. The increasing demand for remote access to full-text information calls for a virtual library where users will be able to identify material in any collection and download it electronically. Recognizing that electronic formats remove all geographical and physical barriers and facilitate the provision of value-added and cost-effective information services, the Library initiated several major activities this year. There is little doubt that this represents the wave of the future, and the Department cannot be found wanting in terms of keeping abreast of the latest technology. In addition, through its system of depository libraries, currently numbering 364 in 141 countries, the Library has also continued to disseminate documents and publications issued by the Department. To ensure more effective oversight and enhanced service to depository libraries, a joint inter-agency programme of visits to these libraries was initiated earlier this year.

24. From the early days of the Organization, it was recognized that the United Nations could not achieve its purposes unless the peoples of the world were fully informed of its aims and activities. In order to support the Organization, people needed to understand what it stood for. It was logical, therefore, that the General Assembly decided in 1946 to establish branch offices of the Department of Public Information to promote an informed understanding of the United Nations among the peoples of the world. These branch offices became the United Nations information centres.

25. The local presence of the information centres and their knowledge of the community have always been a major

strength of our mission to reach as many people as possible around the world. The report of the Task Force stressed that the message of the United Nations needed to be made relevant to people at the country level. This is exactly what the information centres have been doing and doing well.

26. The role of the information centres as a catalyst must also be underscored. Today, much more so than in the past, global affairs are shaped not only by Governments but also by other influential actors, such as non-governmental organizations, media, think-tanks, foundations, educational institutions and the business community. Professionally headed information centres are crucial in regard to keeping these organizations informed and engaged, while drawing on their energy, resource base and networks to promote United Nations communications objectives. The rapid advances in communications technology and computer applications have already had wide-reaching beneficial effects on the effectiveness and relevance of the information centres, and they carry enormous potential for the future.

27. However, these exciting developments happen to converge with a period of budgetary contraction, which has hit especially hard in the field. During the last decade, the information centres have suffered greatly as a result of consecutive cuts in both posts and operational resources. Over the last six years, for example, Professional posts have decreased by 40 per cent. At the same time, additional offices have been established. I fully agree with the concern expressed by the Task Force over the very limited resources being made available for information centres.

28. We are therefore at a crossroads where decisive action on the future of the information centres is needed. My approach is not to lament over insufficient resources, but to look at how we can best do the job with the resources provided to us by the General Assembly. To attain the communications goals set by the Secretary-General, and drawing on recommendations of the Task Force, I am examining very carefully the recommendations regarding the establishment of regional hubs. Moreover, the weaknesses in the integrated centres identified by the Task Force should be fully addressed in a cooperative effort by the Department of Public Information, the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations system partners. Discussions are already taking place within the newly created United Nations Development Group on practical issues in this context.

29. In all aspects of the integration exercise, we will proceed within the parameters set by the General Assembly, namely, on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country and ensuring that the information functions and autonomy of the information centres are not adversely affected.

30. My statement to the Committee is in two parts. The part that I am delivering orally reflects on the conceptual framework set out by the Secretary-General in his report; the second part, which covers the Department's activities over the past year in greater detail, is being distributed to you.

31. In preparing for my participation in the work of the Committee, and in familiarizing myself with the work of the Department of Public Information, I have been very pleased to note the highly extensive range of information activities that the Department undertakes throughout the year. Many of these activities have come to be taken for granted and therefore do not receive the recognition that is due. In developing measures in the context of the process of reorientation, it is my intention to work closely with my colleagues in the Department and to seek to take full advantage of the wealth of expertise they possess. The resources provided to us in the 1998-1999 programme budget are limited. Our task is to deploy these resources more flexibly to highlight the priorities set by the General Assembly and, at the same time, fulfil all our other mandates. One priority should be very clear to all of us: in the information age, the Department of Public Information has to stay in the forefront in serving the international community and the United Nations. Moreover, as the Task Force report states unequivocally: "The communications function should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization."

32. In paragraph 6 of its resolution 52/70 B of 10 December 1997, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twentieth session on United Nations public information activities.

33. Over the period under review, and as part of its efforts to promote informed public understanding worldwide about the goals and activities of the United Nations, the Department of Public Information has continued to develop partnerships and strengthen the channels of communication with a broad range of information redisseminators, including the media, educational institutions, United Nations depository libraries, non-governmental organizations and other elements of civil society. In that endeavour, it has worked closely with other substantive departments of the Secretariat, as well as with the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system to identify information priorities, formulate appropriate information programmes and project a unified message of the United

Nations in order to tackle a wide array of global problems and concerns.

34. The Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General continues to support the Secretary-General in his media functions, including press interviews, press conferences and other media appearances. After the Deputy Secretary-General assumed her functions, the Office began to provide media relations assistance to her, too. The Spokesman travelled with the Secretary-General to Iraq in February and made arrangements for some of the international press corps to accompany the Secretary-General's party. Several journalists also accompanied the Secretary-General during his visit to the Middle East in March and some media representatives are accompanying him during his current visit to Africa.

35. The Office of the Spokesman continues to provide daily briefings for correspondents accredited at Headquarters, followed by briefings for interested delegations, on developments regarding the activities of the Secretary-General and the work of the United Nations. These briefings are the main source of latest information on the Organization. The Office also arranges for press interviews with senior officials of the United Nations and sets up background briefings, such as those on the Secretary-General's recent report on Africa, on the United Nations reform and currently on his trip to Africa. The activities of this office continue to provide vital assistance to correspondents permanently accredited at Headquarters; accreditations numbered 2,352 in 1997, while 3,940 additional temporary media accreditations were issued at Headquarters to media representatives attending specific events or using media services of the Department of Public Information.

36. The Department's press releases issued on a daily basis in both working languages of the Organization continue to provide the only immediately available written account of proceedings of intergovernmental meetings held at Headquarters, as well as a wide range of information on the activities of the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General and the substantive offices of the Secretariat both at Headquarters and in the field. Press releases are now also posted on the Internet for immediate availability to the media, government offices in Member States, the network of United Nations information centres and other offices away from Headquarters, as well as to non-governmental organizations and the public at large.

37. Owing to its direct and far-reaching access and cost-effectiveness, radio remains one of the most important communications media for the United Nations, particularly in times of crisis. During 1997, the Department distributed more than 200,000 cassettes of its taped programmes in 15 languages to some 1,800 radio stations and networks worldwide, thereby providing in-depth coverage of a wide range of issues dealt with by the United Nations and organizations of the United Nations system. The Department has also increased access by broadcasters worldwide to its telephone news feeds. Moreover, since March 1998, daily radio news bulletins in English and French have been encoded into radio news files and posted together with the text on the United Nations home page on the Internet.

38. Over the period under review, the Department, in cooperation with a major national broadcasting network, completed a feasibility study on the implications of the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations, to serve the general public information needs of the United Nations and its common system and also fulfil the specific communications requirements of peacekeeping situations. The Department is currently analysing the findings of this study and will share them with Member States in due course. During the summer, the Department hopes to launch a pilot direct broadcasting service in English and French, initially targeting listeners in Africa and Europe, so as to test the capacity to introduce direct and sustained shortwave programming and evaluate the impact of such broadcasts.

39. Taking advantage of intense media interest in the United Nations generated by the recent visit of the Secretary-General to Iraq, United Nations Television has continued to strengthen its relationship with broadcasters worldwide. Throughout the crisis in Iraq, for example, it provided a great number of national television organizations and international television news syndicators with a comprehensive service, including live coverage, on developments centring around the Security Council, the return of the Secretary-General to Headquarters and other events. Similarly, the television and photo team from the Department that accompanied the Secretary-General to Baghdad was able to make television feeds and still photographs available to large numbers of international media present in the Iraqi capital. During that period, great public interest worldwide led to the broadcast of the Department's documentary material on United Nations work in Iraq on television networks throughout the world.

40. To meet the needs of broadcasters and ensure coverage of United Nations activities, the Department has also continued to pursue co-productions with major broadcasting organizations. It recently co-produced a series of stories about the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) with the British Broadcasting Service and Deutsche Welle, thereby ensuring their coverage of United

Nations activities in that country. Moreover, as part of media outreach for the upcoming special session of the General Assembly on drug issues, the Department has also already produced, within existing resources, three news features in the "UN in Action" series on aspects of the worldwide drug problem, while another feature on this subject is under preparation. By the time of the session, these items will have been distributed to news editors in more than 100 countries in five languages, reaching an estimated audience of 200 million viewers. The Department will also provide international news syndicators with full coverage of the special session. Moreover, a "B-roll" of compilation material on drug issues will also be available to news organizations to supplement their coverage of the debate and statements.

41. The second United Nations World Television Forum which took place in November 1997 is an example of another initiative undertaken by the Department to strengthen relationships with media institutions, seen as key and indispensable partners in projecting United Nations messages to a worldwide audience. Organized in co-sponsorship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy, Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI) and Mediaset and held under the theme "Television in the new multimedia environment", the Forum provided a venue for an ongoing professional dialogue between the United Nations and the television industry, to highlight themes of common interest and identify specific areas of cooperation. It was opened by the Secretary-General, together with Lamberto Dini, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy.

42. The Department is also continuing its efforts to provide training opportunities for journalists and broadcasters from developing countries. Its six-week annual training programme for young media practitioners from developing countries will begin in mid-September for participants from 20 Member States, four of them sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany. A similar programme is being organized for the fourth year in a row for Palestinian media practitioners.

43. The Department is also striving to strengthen partnerships within the Secretariat as well as with the organizations of the United Nations system through the machinery of the Joint United Nations Information Committee for which it continues to provide the secretariat. Forging dynamic professional partnerships at the Headquarters and field levels with other substantive departments of the Secretariat and with partners throughout the United Nations system is instrumental in the effective delivery of United Nations messages and for building an informed and supportive constituency. Such partnerships are also essential if the Department is to fulfil a multitude of mandates with the limited resources at its disposal and develop and implement system-wide thematic information campaigns on priority issues of concern to the international community.

44. This year, in close cooperation with the relevant substantive departments of the Secretariat and with organizations of the system, the Department has developed comprehensive communications programmes to promote several upcoming high-priority observances and conferences. All planned activities are being funded from the regular budget of the Department, as additional resources are no longer allocated for information programmes for conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly.

45. For the upcoming special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, scheduled to take place from 8 to 10 June 1998, the Department is undertaking an accelerated media outreach campaign in the six weeks leading up to the session so as to generate broader understanding of the related issues. This builds on the more long-term activities undertaken by the Department at Headquarters and through the network of United Nations information centres and services in the field in the months leading up to the special session. A similar information programme and range of activities have also been developed for the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, to take place in Rome from 15 June to 17 July 1998.

46. The Department has worked closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to develop a comprehensive information strategy for the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The year-long observance was launched on Human Rights Day, 1997, with a number of events organized by the Department in different venues. In New York, a special event featured several notable speakers, including the First Lady of the United States of America and Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka. This was preceded by a two-day journalists' round table. The United Nations Information Service in Geneva also organized an event to mark the beginning of the anniversary year, as did many other information centres and services around the world. Selections from the text of the instrument and photographs from a major exhibit mounted at Headquarters for the launch of the observance of the fiftieth anniversary are being reproduced in a booklet for broader distribution. The exhibit itself, to which several internationally acclaimed photojournalists contributed their work, was also mounted in Geneva for the annual session of the Commission on Human Rights and will travel to other

venues during the year. An additional exhibit on the recipients of United Nations Human Rights Awards is planned for presentation at Headquarters during the anniversary event this December. Up to now, over 220 language versions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have been produced, more than half of them by the network of United Nations information centres and services worldwide. The centres used the relevant articles of the Declaration as the subject of seminars, student rallies, exhibits, television and radio programmes and countless speaking engagements by centre directors. Other events during this year, such as the observances of International Women's Day and World Press Freedom Day held earlier today, as well as the annual DPI/NGO Conference, are being tied to the relevant provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Department is continuing its efforts to use a proactive media outreach to promote all related activities.

47. The Department has also developed a programme of outreach activities to heighten public awareness of youth issues, broaden substantive knowledge of youth concerns and encourage youth involvement in United Nations issues, in preparation for the World Youth Forum and the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, scheduled to be held in Lisbon in August 1998, to review and appraise the progress in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. Preparations are also under way for the October launch of the International Year of Older Persons (1999). The issue of ageing is already generating great interest among non-governmental organizations and the Department is working closely with a number of groups to prepare activities in observance of the Year.

48. In the area of peace and security, the past year has seen steady emphasis on interdepartmental cooperation to ensure that communications and public information are integral components of the activities in these areas, both at Headquarters and in the field. Progress has been slow, but steady. A manual containing provisional guidelines for public information components in peacekeeping and other field missions has been finalized and is being published as part of the training handbook series produced by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the Secretariat. The two departments continue to consult regularly on budgetary and staffing requirements for public information components in the field and have also cooperated in the establishment of a Trust Fund for Public Information in Peacekeeping. The Fund is intended as a vehicle through which interested donors may supplement resources in mission budgets and will permit rapid start-up of public information activities. The Government of Japan has made the first contribution to this Trust Fund, to strengthen information activities of UNMOT. Cooperation between the two departments also extends to activities in observance of the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping this year, which will provide an opportunity to honour all those who have served in such missions and focus public attention on the value of United Nations peacekeeping as a tool in conflict resolution.

49. As part of its special information programme on the question of Palestine, the Department organized a regional seminar for Asian journalists on the theme "Prospects for peace", held in New Delhi on 3 and 4 February 1998. The Seminar, hosted by the Government of India, brought together Palestinian and Israeli experts, policy makers and journalists, as well as senior media representatives from throughout Asia, to familiarize them with the latest developments in the Palestinian situation. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/51 of 9 December 1997, the Department is preparing another, similar seminar for the European region, to be held in Prague on 25 and 26 June 1998.

50. Non-governmental organizations and other elements of civil society are another key constituency for the United Nations. The Department provides services for a growing number of national and international non-governmental organizations, with 1,547 such organizations now having associate status with it. The Department's Resource Centre has continued to enhance its services to associated and other organizations, becoming a regular meeting place for non-governmental organization committees working on priority issues before the United Nations. The annual DPI/NGO Conference, scheduled to take place from 14 to 16 September 1998, will be held under the theme "The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: from words to deeds".

51. Public interest in the Organization is also enhanced through education and training programmes, special events in observance of selected commemorative days and years, exhibits and services to the public. Events at Headquarters, including those organized in co-sponsorship with external partners, are designed to highlight priority issues of the United Nations and attract media attention, thus augmenting the Department's public outreach function. Services to the public continue to be among the most visible, direct and immediate means at the Department's disposal, currently reaching over 600,000 people annually. When the United Nations is in the news, as it has been in the wake of the Secretary-General's visit to Iraq, the interest of the public increases accordingly. The volume of correspondence,

especially electronic mail handled by the Department, skyrocketed, as did the number of people taking the guided tour, straining thereby the capacity to satisfy this most welcome public interest in the Organization.

52. The guided tour provides visitors with direct, personal contact with the United Nations, giving it a human face. However, the impact of this activity is still diminished owing to the continuing restriction on the number of visitors per guide to 15, limiting both the Department's ability to accommodate all those interested in taking the tour and the income from this activity. Moreover, the tour route is much in need of an overhaul, as many gifts and artwork from Member States need repair and cleaning and many exhibits require updating. While the Department has begun to make some modest improvements, more is needed than is currently allowed through the resources available in its regular budget. The Department is looking forward to the advice and assistance of the Committee in securing possible extrabudgetary resources for this purpose.

53. Outreach to educators is another area pursued by the Department. Over the last year, a series of workshops and seminars for educators, as well as "Students' Days at the United Nations" have been introduced. This summer, the Department will offer two 10-hour workshops for teachers, organized in cooperation with the New York City Board of Education, to better equip teachers to bring the United Nations into the classroom. The Department also organizes briefing programmes, as part of the effort to educate the public and cultivate relationships with educational institutions and representative and influential elements of civil society. Among those, it continued an ongoing semester-long programme with the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and hosted the annual conferences of both the National High-School and the National College Model United Nations, each drawing over 2,000 young people to Headquarters.

54. The last year has seen exponential growth of Internet use as the fourth communications medium available to the Department. While the number of accesses to the United Nations home page had been just over 11 million in 1996, it increased to 42 million in 1997. The number of accesses between the beginning of 1998 and mid-April 1998, coming from 130 countries around the world, crossed the 20 million mark. To meet this demand, the Department established, through redeployment of staff, a new Information Technology Section in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, responsible for the coordination, management and maintenance of the United Nations home page, as well as for assistance and training of user offices in preparation of contents for the site. As additional departments start posting material on-line, the task of maintaining the home page becomes more demanding, requiring additional redeployment of resources to meet the growing needs. At present, efforts are continuing to redesign the structure of the United Nations home page, making it more user-friendly and adding new features, such as audio files. Also, in accordance with provisions of General Assembly resolution 52/214 C of 22 December 1997 in which the Assembly stipulated that the home page should be made available in all official languages, a pilot Web site in Russian has just been launched. In addition, 12 United Nations information centres and services use their own home pages to expand outreach, while 14 additional centres are also preparing to launch Web sites. In the months to come, the Department hopes to increase the range of official documentation and public information materials available through its home page, making most of them available either at the same time as, or even earlier than, the printed versions. This will enhance the use of Internet communications between Headquarters and offices in the field. New techniques will also be used to ensure more attractive and user-friendly presentation of the materials, with enhanced search functions.

55. The United Nations CyberSchoolBus, a pioneering educational project available through electronic mail, reaches thousands of schools and tens of thousands of students in over 50 countries with biweekly announcements and information. While its backbone on the production and dissemination end is held together by the power and potential of information technology, its emphasis is on high content, not technology. Using the basic medium of electronic mail, United Nations offices and non-governmental organizations even in the least developed countries are able to transmit information on United Nations activities to a network of schools and educators who lack their own electronic mail access.

56. Electronic technology also continues to impact on the changing role and programme delivery of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. In April 1997, an Electronic Resources Development Section was established in the Library to bring under one roof the maintenance and development of the Integrated Library Management System (ILMS) and other computer systems, the Internet/Intranet sites, and the shared indexing and preservation programmes, as well as the testing and evaluation of new electronic services on the market. Recognizing that electronic formats remove all geographical and physical barriers and facilitate the provision of value-added and cost-effective information services, the Library initiated three major activities this year:

the launching of a daily desktop delivery of major news stories concerning the Organization, "UN in the News", which now reaches an audience of over 3,000 delegates and staff throughout the United Nations system; the strengthening and expansion of its training programme in electronic information retrieval; and an expansion of electronic desktop dissemination of time-/mission-critical information. Because electronic subscriptions have proved to be more cost-effective and timely, the Library has continued its efforts to replace print with electronic subscriptions whenever possible and to initiate cost recovery where feasible. It has also initiated the United Nations System Consortium, which, through system-wide subscriptions to electronic information from the Economist Information Unit, Oxford Analytica, NewsEdge and other services, realized approximately US$ 60 million in purchase cost savings for the United Nations for the first four months of 1998 alone. At present, 20 members are taking advantage of the volume-driven subscription rates available through this service, and several other organizations of the United Nations system are considering membership. This initiative has enabled the permanent missions to have access to electronic information previously available only to Secretariat staff.

57. Over the period under review, the Library's home page has been expanded to include "UN-I-QUE", a searchable database for selected United Nations documents from 1946 to the present; "Documents Alert", a service announcing the availability of new important documents; "Maps", a site in English and French containing updated maps of current peacekeeping operations; "United Nations Documents: research guide", an on-line guide to the structure, organization and use of United Nations documents; and a complete listing of electronic resources available in the Library and its branch offices. The Library has also posted Cyberlinks, a collection of links to regional and country Internet information resources and news services, which has recently been enriched by a listing of special substantive topics, such as peacekeeping, human rights, environment and so forth.

58. The Library has completed the conversion of the United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBIS) database to the new format. At present, UNBIS includes, for the period 1946–1997, resolutions of the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, Security Council and the Commission on Human Rights, as well as documents of the International Court of Justice. Retrospective indexing of pre-1978 documents of the Security Council has been initiated. Two major publications have been prepared as vital tools of UNBIS: Index to resolutions of the Security Council (1946–1996), issued in 1997; and United Nations document series symbols (1946–1996), issued in 1998. Through ILMS, the Library will enhance the linkages between UNBIS and the optical disk system to create a complete resource on United Nations documentation. ILMS will also serve as the basis of a shared indexing network linking libraries at Headquarters with overseas duty stations. Through a more innovative use of technology, the UNBIS catalogue will provide a truly interactive resource that will include Internet sites of the United Nations system and image files of selected United Nations maps. Digital files of maps, together with accompanying documents, will also be available in the optical disk system. To meet the requests by Member States, the Library has initiated, in cooperation with the Department of Management, a programme of retrospective digitization of documents from the United Nations microfiche collection, to be uploaded to the optical disk system.

59. Through its system of depository libraries, currently numbering 364 in 141 countries, the Library has also continued to disseminate documents and publications issued by the Organization. To ensure more effective oversight and enhanced service to depository libraries, a joint inter-agency programme of visits to those institutions was initiated earlier this year.

60. Despite the increasingly sophisticated technology available to much of the Department's core audiences, a recent worldwide survey of readership of its publications revealed the continuing demand for print products. While the survey showed the wide availability of the Internet, even in the most developed countries there was a clear, strong assertion from groups that work actively to redisseminate information about the United Nations that print publications remain vital to their work. The Department's Design Unit, which consistently produces outstanding designs to meet the needs of both the Department and other parts of the Secretariat, continues to receive the plaudits of all those who use its services.

61. The survey, carried out to assess the continuing relevance of *UN Chronicle*, *Africa Recovery* and other recurrent publications by the Department, confirmed the large hunger for information about the Organization. A number of innovations have been introduced to further enhance the value of these publications to their readership. More attractive covers, greater use of graphics and photographs, and articles about and interviews with eminent personalities and authors have been introduced in the *UN Chronicle* and other publications. A thematic approach, bringing out the relevance of the entire United Nations system to peoples' daily lives, has replaced the descriptive accounts of deliberations in various bodies in publications

such as *Basic Facts*. To meet the demand for updated information, publications such as *UN in Brief* and *Image & Reality* are now being issued yearly and in more languages than before, and also placed on the United Nations home page for readers with access to the Internet.

62. Another method of disseminating United Nations information is through the sale of its publications. During the biennium 1996–1997, the Department's Sales and Marketing Section reported an excess of income over expenditure amounting to US$ 1.7 million, exceeding almost three times its estimated earnings for that period. For the second biennium in succession, this Section was leading over all other revenue-producing activities of the Organization, reporting some 45 per cent of the total revenue for the biennium.

63. Over the last year, the Department has further enhanced its cooperation with the World Bank to ensure that *Development Business* remains the premier vehicle for fast, efficient information on procurement for projects in developing countries across the entire United Nations family and the world's major regional development banks. A new product, Development Business Online – a commercial Web site now in development with the cooperation of the World Bank – will be launched shortly. With its sophisticated search capabilities and continuous updating, it will offer subscribers faster, easier access to the information now published in *Development Business* and will generate additional subscribers.

64. Given the high priority accorded by the United Nations to peace and sustainable development in Africa, the Department has focused, with considerable success, on raising the profile of the continent in the media. A major media outreach effort, which included the production of some very effective press materials disseminated worldwide, ensured that the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly and the Security Council on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa was prominently covered by much of the world's press. Another campaign, undertaken during the recent visit by the President of the United States of America to several African countries, succeeded in obtaining coverage of both the continent's remarkable economic turnaround and its continuing need for development assistance and debt relief. The upcoming summit-level Tokyo Conference on African Development, at which the United Nations will be a full partner, will, similarly, give the Department an opportunity to disseminate widely information about Africa.

65. The local presence of the United Nations information centres and their knowledge of the conditions in the countries that they serve have always been a major strength of the United Nations mission to reach as many people around the world as possible. The report of the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities stressed that the message of the United Nations needed to be made relevant to people at the country level. United Nations information centres worldwide are uniquely equipped to perform that function at the local level and to bring to the members of their communities a sense of the relevance of the work of the United Nations to those members' daily lives, by tailoring the Organization's message to local conditions and interests for maximum impact and providing it with a local face and voice.

66. The activities of the United Nations information centres over the past year reflect a strengthened emphasis on educational and youth outreach and growing partnerships with the ever-expanding community of non-governmental organizations. In several locations, the business community has also provided opportunities for cooperation in support of United Nations themes.

67. Some activities have been extraordinary in their scale and impact. For example, the United Nations Information Centre in Rome reached an agreement with Benetton, the clothing manufacturer, to feature articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the company's worldwide advertising campaign, including billboards in New York City, reaching an estimated 60 countries. Other activities were extraordinary in different ways. For example, staff of the United Nations Information Centre in Yangon set up a United Nations booth at a pagoda festival in Pindaya, Myanmar. Since plywood boards were not available, bamboo mats were framed with bamboo slats to serve as poster display boards. The end result was that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – along with other achievements of the United Nations – was brought to the attention of thousands of local people who visited the pagoda festival.

68. United Nations information centres have also been very active in disseminating information about United Nations reform and in organizing activities relating to narcotic drugs, in particular with the view to publicizing the upcoming special session of the General Assembly on that issue. In most countries of the world, concerns of young people are not confined to the borders of their own country. They are exposed to all the vital questions of our day, and feel that they have a stake in the future of our planet. Very often, they want the United Nations to be part of the

answers. That is why educational and student outreach programmes are among the fastest-growing activities of the United Nations information centres and services worldwide, encompassing student briefings, adaptation of United Nations educational kits, teacher training, curriculum support, workshops and other means of bringing the United Nations into the classroom.

69. Over the last year, all information centres were provided with the very latest computer technology. Staff were trained both in computer applications and in Internet use. That most centres now have the ability to communicate by electronic mail contributes to our being brought closer together and makes possible the immediate transmittal of the latest information from Headquarters. The optical disk system, while not yet available at all centres, has contributed greatly to the enhancement of services to the media, researchers and the public at large. Intense efforts are also under way to explore the use of videoconferencing as a means of expanding the outreach of United Nations information centres.